Journal of Interdisciplinary Feminist Thought

Volume 4
Issue 1 *Women and Spirituality*

Article 6

6-1-2010

Mary J. Henold: Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement.

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Mary J. Henold: ***Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement.***
Chapel Hill, N.C. : The University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 291 pp.
ISBN 9780807832240 (cloth)

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As Henold's subtitle claims, her study of the American Catholic feminist movement during the era of second wave feminism contains elements that are, indeed, surprising. While her history is broadly chronological, she takes several approaches in telling this story, analyzing key participants, publications, organizations, and events. Part of the benefit of this multi-faceted approach is that she avoids giving the reader the impression that there was a single American Catholic feminist agenda. Henold's study is the first comprehensive history to focus on the origins and development of Catholic second wave feminism, and she is careful to show that the movement had some unity, but there also were differences in what Catholic feminists hoped to achieve.

One of the possibly surprising aspects of the history of the movement is that feminism in the Church was not imported from the larger feminist ideals of the secular world. Instead, the feminism that developed in the Church grew out of Church teachings. Many feminists in the Church saw their agendas formed by the social justice teachings of the Church, in particular from teachings advanced during Vatican II. The fact that the Vatican II council resulted in the development of feminism is ironic, insofar as the council originally had no women representatives; it was only in the third session that women were invited as observers. In a coup for the movement, six women were made voting members of the commission preparing the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World; all women in attendance were forced to use a separate café constructed for their use (46). This was just one example of many that raised feminists' ire over women's second class status in the Church.

Henold discusses several strains of the feminism that developed during these years. One example was liberal feminists who became radical feminists, who then typically left the Church. Mary Daly and Elizabeth Farians were two of the more well-known women who did so. While many historians of this period point to Mary Daly as the archetypal American Catholic feminist, Henold argues that this is misleading. The majority of Catholic feminists were in the "loyal opposition"; they wanted to change the Church from within, not leave it.

Another surprising aspect of this history was that a number of the women who became feminists and feminist leaders did not start with a necessarily feminist agenda. Henold cites the example of the members of the Deaconess Movement. These women were not fighting for ordination because they wanted equality in the Church; they fought for ordination because they felt a calling to be ordained, and the Church would not allow them to be priests or deacons. It was in the service of that goal that they questioned the patriarchal structure of the Church, the inequality of women, and Church tradition that held that women could not be ordained. Similarly, many women's religious orders looked to expand their apostolates in the wake of Vatican II, and in so doing, they clashed with bishops as they tried to implement changes. Many sisters came to develop a feminist consciousness as they dealt with these clashes with male authority.

Henold compares two major events late in the movement's history to demonstrate changes in the movement. The First Women's Ordination Conference held in Detroit in 1975 was the first large-scale gathering of American Catholic feminists. The participants were committed both to feminism and to the Church; they not only wanted ordination, but also renewal of the priesthood and the Church itself. The Second Women's Ordination Conference, held in 1978 in Baltimore, lacked the unity of purpose that was prevalent at the first conference. Some participants questioned the idea of accepting ordination into the priesthood before the Church had undergone major reform. The women in attendance who were aspiring to the priesthood were not expecting this criticism from within the movement. Divisions within the movement were made clear during the final liturgical celebration: a Mass, presided over by a supportive priest, was scheduled for the conference closing. An alternative liturgy, for women only, was held at the same time; conference participants thus felt obligated to choose where their loyalties lay. Even though the movement never had a single, unifying agenda, this division demonstrated that some women had given up hope that dialogue would ever lead to reform, and so they further moved into the margins. By the early 1980s, the apex of the movement was over, overshadowed by the papacy of John Paul II and the presidency of Ronald Reagan (237).

This reader found Henold's study to be surprising for another reason: not once in 20 years of Catholic school education, including four years at a Catholic women's college, was I taught any of this history. No church history class mentioned the Easter Bonnet Rebellion; or Instruction 66 of the revised Missal in 1970, which allowed for women lectors, as long as they stood outside the sanctuary gates; or the stories of most of the women who were the first American Catholic feminists, and what choices they had to make about leaving the Church or staying as the loyal opposition. I came of age in the same Church where John Paul II allowed for women altar servers in the 1990s, a crumb from the altar for those women who felt called to be priests.

This history is also surprising for how much these women accomplished, and for how little the Church changed. While women now can be Eucharistic ministers and altar servers, and perhaps have more authority in local parish affairs, the Church's general attitude towards women appears unmoved. One need only look to recent events to see that the institutional Church is still trying to keep women in their place. In January 2009, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life announced that it would conduct a visitation - an investigation - of the conduct of life of U.S. women religious; in February 2009, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith announced a visitation for doctrinal assessment of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR).[1] One of the issues to be investigated by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is the LCWR's position on ordination of women priests.[2] Even though the Vatican published the "Declaration on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood" in 1977, some women still feel called to ordination, and the Church still asserts that this is not open to discussion. If some feminists left the Church because they tired of waiting for reform, they probably made the right choice; some forty years later, not much has changed.

Henold briefly touches upon the racism and classism that was prevalent in the movement; while these problems are not the focus of her study, it is helpful to acknowledge that the movement

[1] Gramick, Jeannine, "The Vatican's war on dissent," *Conscience* 30, no. 2 (2009) : 46.
[2] *Ibid*.

was largely centered on a certain socio-economic class of white women, who were not always aware of, or sympathetic to, the concerns of other American Catholic women (cf. 225-226). Another criticism of the movement is that it typically addressed theoretical issues, not the concerns of laywomen who were experiencing sexism in the local parish (130). Since many of the women who were trained theologians were also women religious, there was often a tension between sisters and laywomen; sisters rarely addressed the concerns of parish or family life, thus leaving most laywomen to feel excluded from the concerns of the movement (131).

Henold discusses several elements that were important in the movement: using liturgy, including the development of feminist liturgies; engaging in dialogue both within the movement and with Church leaders; and taking a position of ambivalence towards the Church, wherein the loyal opposition stayed within the Church, but in the margins. In her discussion of liturgy, Henold could have expanded her explanation of the idea of liturgy to be clearer. To someone unfamiliar with the concept of liturgy, the brief explanation is insufficient (146). Similarly, her discussion of the new apostolates (20) for women religious would not be clear for someone unfamiliar with the idea. These, however, are minor criticisms of a history that was well researched, and well written. It is a compelling read, and I recommend it not only for Catholics, but also for secular feminists.

Sr. Theresa Kane, RSM addressing John Paul II, during the 1979 Papal Visit to America, at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC. Sr. Kane, then the President of the Leadership conference of Women Religious, welcomed the Holy Father and respectfully noted that women were excluded from full service and participation in all the ministries of the Church.
Permission to use photo granted by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious